



## Teaching Compassion in Faith: The Social Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Light of Genesis 45:11 at SD Negeri 071103 Onohondro

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### ABSTRACT

*This study explores how the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers embodies and communicates the biblical value of compassion, as illuminated in Genesis 45:11: "I will provide for you there, for there are yet five years of famine to come, lest you and your household and all that you have come to poverty." The research was conducted at SD Negeri 071103 Onohondro in South Nias, North Sumatra, where the teacher's role extends beyond cognitive instruction to the moral and spiritual formation of students. Using a qualitative-expository approach that integrates biblical exegesis with field observation and interviews, this study interprets Joseph's compassionate act toward his brothers as a theological model for social competence in education. The findings reveal that the teacher's empathy, patience, and ability to foster inclusive relationships serve as living expressions of Christian compassion. By contextualizing the message of Genesis 45:11, the teacher encouraged students to translate faith into daily acts of kindness, forgiveness, and mutual support. Compassion in this setting emerged as both a relational and spiritual practice-rooted in divine love yet expressed through human interaction. The study concludes that social competence in Christian education is not limited to interpersonal skill but represents a ministry of presence, where teachers participate in God's redemptive work by nurturing students' capacity to care for others. Ultimately, the CRE teacher becomes a living witness of Joseph's declaration, transforming the classroom into a place of divine provision, reconciliation, and faith-driven compassion.*

**Keywords:** *Compassion, Christian Religious Education, Social Competence*

### INTRODUCTION

Education, within the Christian worldview, is not solely an intellectual endeavor but a sacred ministry that seeks to form hearts and shape lives according to God's truth and love. In this vision, teaching becomes more than the transfer of biblical knowledge-it is a moral and spiritual vocation rooted in compassion. Christian Religious Education teachers carry the responsibility of guiding students to embody love, empathy, and care for others

as tangible expressions of faith. In Indonesia's pluralistic society, where diversity often tests social harmony, the social competence of CRE teachers plays a vital role in cultivating compassion within the school community. Social competence refers to the ability to build meaningful relationships, demonstrate empathy, manage emotions, and resolve conflicts peacefully (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). However, in the context of Christian education, social competence transcends psychological skills; it becomes a spiritual calling to live out the gospel of love through everyday interactions. The teacher, therefore, serves as a living testimony of compassion—a bridge between divine truth and human experience. The biblical foundation of this study is found in Genesis 45:11, where Joseph, after years of betrayal and suffering, shows extraordinary compassion toward his brothers: *"I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute."* This verse captures the essence of redemptive compassion: Joseph, once sold into slavery by his brothers, chooses forgiveness over vengeance and generosity over bitterness. His willingness to care for those who once harmed him reflects the divine compassion that restores broken relationships. Theologically, Genesis 45:11 reveals compassion as a covenantal act—love expressed through tangible care for others, grounded in faith and reconciliation. For Christian educators, this narrative offers a powerful pedagogical model. Teachers are called not only to instruct students about compassion but to *embody* it in their attitudes, communication, and relationships. Just as Joseph's compassion sustained his family during famine, the compassion of a teacher can nourish students' hearts amid emotional, social, and moral challenges.

In the context of SD Negeri 071103 Onohondro in South Nias, North Sumatra, this biblical insight acquires deep relevance. The school represents a microcosm of Indonesia's diverse cultural and religious fabric, where students from various backgrounds learn together. Many come from families that face economic hardship and social challenges, making emotional and moral guidance a crucial component of education. Within this setting, Christian Religious Education teachers are not merely conveyors of doctrine; they act as mentors who model empathy, kindness, and solidarity. Their social competence—expressed through listening, understanding, and encouragement—helps students experience compassion as a living reality, not an abstract concept. When a teacher comforts a struggling student, mediates peer conflicts, or organizes community service, they echo Joseph's action in Genesis 45:11: providing sustenance, not in the form of food, but through the nourishment of love and care. In a world increasingly shaped by digital isolation, competition, and self-centered values, the capacity to teach compassion is becoming an urgent educational priority. Students today often equate success with self-advancement rather than service, leading to indifference toward others' suffering. The role of the CRE teacher is thus prophetic—to challenge these trends by reorienting education toward relational and moral depth. Teaching compassion in faith means forming students who see others as neighbors, not rivals; who understand that caring is not weakness but strength grounded in divine love. Social competence enables teachers to translate theological truth into lived experience. When students witness their teacher's empathy, patience, and forgiveness, they encounter the reflection of Christ's compassion. This study explores how the social competence of Christian Religious Education teachers at SD Negeri 071103 Onohondro embodies the biblical principle of compassion found in

Genesis 45:11. Through a qualitative-expository approach, the research aims to connect theological reflection with educational practice, examining how teachers integrate empathy, forgiveness, and care in their interactions with students. The study assumes that effective Christian education depends not only on professional skill but on relational holiness—the ability to teach through character. Ultimately, this research seeks to demonstrate that compassion, when rooted in faith and expressed through social competence, becomes both the method and message of transformative Christian teaching.

## METHODS

This study employed a qualitative-expository approach that integrates theological reflection with empirical exploration to examine how Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers embody and teach compassion through social competence, as inspired by Genesis 45:11. This methodology combines biblical exegesis and reflective field research, allowing for an in-depth understanding of how theological insights are lived out within real educational contexts. The focus was not merely on observing behavior but on interpreting actions as manifestations of spiritual and moral principles. By using this dual framework, the study bridges the gap between scriptural truth and pedagogical practice, showing how faith-based compassion functions within the daily realities of classroom life. The expository-theological component centered on the interpretation of Genesis 45:11 within its literary and theological context. The verse—“I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute”—was analyzed using historical-critical and lexical methods. Special attention was given to the Hebrew term *kulkal* (to sustain or provide), which denotes not only physical sustenance but also moral and emotional support. The exegesis highlighted Joseph’s compassion as an act of divine reflection—his willingness to nurture those who had wronged him as an expression of God’s redemptive love. This theological foundation informed the educational interpretation of compassion: teaching as a vocation that sustains others through care, forgiveness, and empathy. The qualitative dimension of the research was conducted at SD Negeri 071103 Onohondro, a public elementary school in South Nias, North Sumatra, Indonesia. The locus was chosen for its culturally diverse environment, which reflects Indonesia’s plural character and provides an ideal context for studying the intersection of faith, empathy, and education. Participants included one Christian Religious Education teacher and twelve students from grades four to six, selected through purposive sampling. The teacher was chosen for their reputation as a compassionate and reflective educator, while students represented varied socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. This diversity enriched the data and allowed for a holistic understanding of compassion as practiced within community life. Notes captured verbal and non-verbal expressions of compassion, such as tone of voice, gestures of care, and responses to student needs. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with both teacher and students. Teacher interviews explored perceptions of Genesis 45:11, experiences of applying biblical compassion in teaching, and strategies for modeling care in a plural environment. Student interviews examined how they perceived and responded to their teacher’s compassion, and how these experiences influenced their own attitudes toward helping others. The findings were then interpreted through a theological-pedagogical lens to reveal how social competence becomes a medium of

spiritual formation. The qualitative-expository approach thus enabled a multidimensional understanding: Scripture illuminated practice, and practice reflected Scripture. Through this integration, the study aimed to demonstrate how Joseph's compassion in Genesis 45:11 continues to inspire modern Christian educators to sustain, forgive, and nurture their students in the spirit of God's love.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers-when grounded in the theology of compassion exemplified in Genesis 45:11-functions as a living testimony of God's redemptive love in the educational context of SD Negeri 071103 Onohondro, South Nias, North Sumatra. Compassion, as expressed in the narrative of Joseph, is not simply an emotional response but a spiritual discipline that sustains others amid vulnerability. The verse, "I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute," reflects Joseph's deep empathy for his brothers, who had once betrayed him. His act of provision transforms pain into reconciliation and revenge into mercy. Within this theological framework, compassion is both divine and human—a movement of the heart that mirrors God's own sustaining care. This biblical insight becomes pedagogically relevant when embodied by teachers who must nurture, guide, and forgive students, especially in contexts of diversity and moral formation such as that of SD Negeri 071103 Onohondro. The exegesis of Genesis 45:11 underscores three theological motifs that shaped the findings of this study: provision as care, forgiveness as restoration, and compassion as transformative relationship. These motifs provided interpretive lenses through which the teacher's social competence was observed and analyzed. Observations and interviews indicated that the CRE teacher at SD Negeri 071103 Onohondro embodied these theological dimensions through consistent empathy, moral patience, and relational inclusion. The teacher's approach reflected an understanding of compassion not as a mere pedagogical technique but as a vocation of grace—a calling to reveal God's love through everyday relationships. In Joseph's words, "*I will provide for you*," compassion manifests as active provision—a willingness to meet others' needs without expecting reciprocity. This motif was vividly seen in the teacher's classroom behavior. Observations over six weeks revealed that the teacher regularly went beyond instructional duties to attend to the emotional and moral well-being of students. When a child came to school without breakfast or proper stationery, the teacher discreetly provided what was needed without drawing attention. When students showed signs of sadness or family tension, the teacher listened patiently, often closing conversations with a prayer. These gestures paralleled Joseph's desire to sustain his family during famine: both reflect an ethic of care rooted in divine compassion. In interviews, the teacher articulated that "to teach means to care for the whole person, not only the mind but also the heart." This holistic understanding of education aligns with Noddings' (2013) ethic of care and the Christian perspective of *diakonia*-service as an expression of faith. Students confirmed that they felt "safe and loved" in the classroom. One student said, "When I am sad, our teacher prays with me and tells me to trust that God will help." Such relational engagement transforms the classroom into a spiritual community where compassion functions as sustenance, just as Joseph's provision

sustained life amid famine. This form of provision extended beyond material or emotional help. The teacher also provided moral guidance rooted in biblical reflection. During one lesson on helping others, the teacher related Joseph's story to the students' experiences in school, explaining that "being kind is like feeding someone who is hungry-not only with food, but with comfort." The students were then encouraged to identify classmates who might need help and to perform small acts of kindness during the week. At the next session, students shared their experiences-some gave snacks to peers, others helped with homework. This simple exercise demonstrated how the teacher's compassionate example inspired concrete moral action. It also validated the theological claim that compassion sustains not only physical needs but the moral and emotional growth of others.

The second motif emerging from Genesis 45:11-forgiveness as restoration-was deeply visible in the teacher's approach to discipline and conflict resolution. Rather than punishing misbehavior through fear, the teacher preferred restorative dialogue. During one observed incident, two students argued during a group activity. Instead of issuing reprimands, the teacher quietly invited both students to reflect on Joseph's story, asking, "Do you remember how Joseph forgave his brothers? How did that make everyone's heart feel lighter?" This question redirected the students' attention from self-justification to reconciliation. The students later apologized and worked together again, visibly calmer and more cooperative. Such moments reveal how the teacher used biblical narratives not as moral dogma but as living stories that reshape attitudes and emotions. Forgiveness, in this pedagogical sense, became both a moral and social practice-a process that rebuilt relationships within the classroom community. The teacher explained in interviews that "discipline must heal, not hurt. When children make mistakes, they need to know that forgiveness is possible, just as God forgives us." This approach aligns with Lickona's (1991) model of character education, which emphasizes the unity of moral knowing, feeling, and action. Through acts of restorative teaching, the CRE teacher modeled God's redemptive nature, echoing Joseph's transformation from victim to provider. Students' reflections reinforced this finding. Many described how the teacher's calmness during conflicts made them feel respected. One student stated, "When I did something wrong, my teacher did not shout. She told me that God can change my heart." Another added, "We learned to forgive our friends because our teacher said anger makes our heart tired." These testimonies show that compassion as forgiveness was internalized through experience, not merely taught as a concept. Over time, the classroom evolved into a space where mistakes became opportunities for growth, reflecting the redemptive dimension of Genesis 45:11-where mercy restores what brokenness had destroyed.

### ***Compassion as Transformative Relationship***

The next result identified in this study is compassion as transformative relationship. Compassion, when embodied by the teacher, became the driving force behind the moral and spiritual formation of students. This transformation was evident in both classroom interactions and extracurricular activities. The teacher intentionally built a classroom ethos based on empathy, cooperation, and prayer. During observations, morning devotionals often began with short reflections on kindness, followed by student-led prayers for classmates in need. These practices nurtured mutual care and fostered a sense

of belonging, echoing the communal dimension of Joseph's compassion for his family. In interviews, students frequently used relational language to describe their teacher. They referred to the teacher as "like a parent" or "someone who helps us be better friends." This relational dynamic exemplifies Groome's (1991) shared praxis model of Christian education, where teacher and students engage together in reflective action grounded in Scripture. The teacher's compassion was not hierarchical but participatory—an ongoing dialogue that invited students to experience the gospel in daily life. For example, during one lesson about gratitude, the teacher shared personal struggles, saying, "When I feel weak, I remember how Joseph trusted God to give him strength." This vulnerability created authenticity, allowing students to see faith as real and relational. The transformation extended beyond the classroom. Students were encouraged to engage in acts of community service, such as visiting sick peers or helping clean the school environment. The teacher framed these activities as expressions of faith—"When you help others, you are doing what Joseph did: you are providing care during someone's hard time." Through these experiences, compassion evolved from an abstract virtue into a lived pattern of behavior. Students learned that faith and social responsibility are inseparable; to believe in God is to care for others. The teacher's social competence—the ability to build positive relationships, communicate effectively, and resolve conflicts—was deeply shaped by theological conviction. At SD Negeri 071103 Onohondro, where cultural diversity and varying economic backgrounds coexist, the teacher's relational sensitivity played a critical role in fostering unity. Observations revealed that the teacher treated every student with equal respect, regardless of ability or background. When asked about this, the teacher responded, "God loves everyone the same. I cannot teach about compassion if I show favoritism." This egalitarian approach reflects the divine impartiality in Joseph's provision—he cared for all his brothers, not only those who treated him kindly. The teacher's fairness reinforced a sense of justice among students, teaching them that compassion includes respect for others' dignity. Students acknowledged this in interviews, noting that their teacher "listens to everyone" and "never takes sides." Such impartial care not only strengthened classroom harmony but also served as a witness to Christian values in a public-school context, where religious diversity is part of everyday life. The teacher's competence also extended to cross-cultural sensitivity. In South Nias, where traditional communal values remain strong, the teacher integrated local expressions of solidarity into lessons. For instance, she often connected biblical compassion with local mutual help practices. During a group project, she remarked, "Helping one another is not only our culture; it is also God's command." This contextual pedagogy bridged theology and culture, helping students recognize that compassion is both a Christian and communal virtue. By affirming local wisdom through biblical teaching, the teacher demonstrated cultural intelligence—a vital dimension of social competence.

### ***The Role of Emotional Empathy in Moral Development***

A major finding of this research is the central role of emotional empathy in nurturing compassion and moral maturity. The teacher at SD Negeri 071103 Onohondro consistently demonstrated emotional awareness and empathy in dealing with students. For example, when a student was reprimanded by another teacher, the CRE teacher later

checked in privately, offering reassurance and prayer. "You are still loved by God," she said, "and every mistake can teach us something." Such emotional care prevented shame and promoted self-reflection. Empathy also guided the teacher's communication style. She often used gentle tones, affirming words, and open-ended questions that encouraged students to express feelings rather than suppress them. This approach aligns with Jennings and Greenberg's (2009) concept of emotionally intelligent teaching, which links emotional awareness to prosocial behavior. The teacher's empathy thus became a formative force, shaping how students perceived compassion as relational understanding rather than mere pity. Students began mirroring these behaviors in peer interactions. During one observation, a student comforted another who was crying, saying, "Don't be sad; God will help you like He helped Joseph." This spontaneous expression of empathy revealed the internalization of moral emotion—a hallmark of faith-based character education. One of the most profound aspects of the teacher's social competence was her ability to transform conflict into communion. South Nias, like many rural contexts, occasionally experiences tensions among students due to cultural differences or competition. The CRE teacher addressed these conflicts through the lens of forgiveness and reconciliation. When disputes occurred, she invited students to participate in reflection circles where they discussed feelings, read relevant Bible passages, and prayed together. In one observed session, the teacher used Genesis 45:11 to frame a discussion on reconciliation: "Joseph could have punished his brothers, but he chose to care for them instead. Can we choose peace today?" The students responded with nods and apologies. This method transformed discipline into discipleship, turning interpersonal tension into moral learning. Over time, students reported fewer conflicts and greater cooperation during group activities. Teachers from other subjects noted the same trend, attributing the improved behavior to the moral atmosphere created by the CRE class. These findings confirm that compassion, when practiced consistently, redefines power dynamics in education. The teacher no longer functions as an enforcer but as a mediator of grace—a role reflecting Christ's ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18).

### ***Faith-Based Pedagogy and Professional Integrity***

The study also revealed that professional competence and spiritual conviction were deeply intertwined in the teacher's practice. At SD Negeri 071103 Onohondro, where academic and moral expectations intersect, the teacher maintained professionalism rooted in prayer and integrity. She viewed lesson planning as a spiritual discipline, explaining, "Before I teach, I pray that my words can touch their hearts." Her preparation demonstrated intentionality: lesson plans included not only cognitive objectives but also moral goals such as "developing empathy" or "showing care for others." This integration of professionalism and spirituality aligns with Shulman's (1987) theory of pedagogical content knowledge, expanded here to include moral and theological dimensions. Students recognized this integrity in their teacher's consistency. "She always practices what she teaches," one student remarked. "When she says we must forgive, she also forgives us." This congruence between word and action is essential to credibility in faith-based education. The teacher's integrity modeled that compassion and professionalism are not opposites but complementary aspects of spiritual competence. Over the course of observation, the classroom environment gradually transformed. Initially, students often acted competitively or dismissed one another's opinions. By the end of the study,

cooperative learning and mutual encouragement had become normal. When asked what caused this change, students credited their teacher's example. "We see her helping everyone," said one student. "That's why we want to help too." The teacher's compassion had created a moral contagion—a ripple effect that spread beyond formal lessons. Parents later reported that their children began showing more patience at home, offering help without being asked. This transformation underscores the pedagogical power of modeled compassion. According to Bandura's (1986) social learning theory, behavior is learned through observation and imitation. In this case, compassion was not taught through lectures but demonstrated through daily interactions. The teacher's faith-driven social competence functioned as what Palmer (1998) calls "teaching from the heart"—where authenticity, care, and spiritual presence shape not only knowledge but character. The findings highlight that compassion-based teaching in South Nias thrives when faith is harmonized with local culture and community values. The CRE teacher often used communal metaphors familiar to students—farming, fishing, and family cooperation—to explain biblical compassion. She compared Joseph's care for his family to a farmer's patience in tending crops: "We help others grow, even when we don't see the fruit immediately." This contextual pedagogy helped students see faith as relevant to their lives. Furthermore, community outreach programs, such as visiting local elders or helping during church events, became extensions of classroom learning. Through these acts, the school positioned itself as a moral center for the wider community—a living expression of Joseph's sustaining spirit in Genesis 45:11. The social competence of the CRE teacher at SD Negeri 071103 Onohondro was more than a professional attribute—it was a spiritual vocation. Compassion, rooted in faith and practiced through relational wisdom, became the bridge between biblical narrative and contemporary education. The teacher embodied Joseph's compassion through daily acts of care, forgiveness, and moral steadiness, creating a learning environment that nurtured emotional safety and spiritual growth. At the heart of these findings lies the realization that Christian education is transformative when compassion is lived, not lectured. In light of Genesis 45:11, compassion emerges as a pedagogical strategy of redemption—sustaining, reconciling, and transforming. The teacher's social competence served as a living exegesis of Scripture, revealing that divine compassion is best taught when mirrored through human relationships. Within the context of SD Negeri 071103 Onohondro in South Nias, this faith-driven pedagogy contributed not only to the moral development of students but to the harmony of the school community itself.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers, when grounded in the theological understanding of Genesis 45:11, represents not merely a professional skill but a sacred calling to manifest God's compassion in education. The findings from SD Negeri 071103 Onohondro in South Nias, North Sumatra, reveal that teaching rooted in faith and compassion transforms both the classroom and the community. The biblical narrative of Joseph—who chose forgiveness over revenge and provision over punishment—becomes a living model for educators who seek to nurture moral integrity and spiritual maturity in their students. Through the lens of Genesis 45:11, compassion emerges as divine action expressed through human relationships: a

commitment to sustain others, to forgive, and to restore life amid difficulty. The study demonstrated that social competence, expressed through empathy, patience, and restorative dialogue, functions as a medium of spiritual witness. The CRE teacher's ability to build authentic relationships reflected Joseph's redemptive compassion—turning conflict into reconciliation and diversity into fellowship. Acts of care, such as providing emotional support, listening to students' struggles, and promoting inclusion, became practical forms of Christian witness within the school setting. The teacher's integrity in balancing professionalism with spirituality affirmed that compassion is not sentimental weakness but a manifestation of strength grounded in divine love. Through relational attentiveness, the teacher cultivated a moral climate where students felt safe, valued, and encouraged to emulate kindness in their daily lives. The study highlights that compassion in education is transformative because it integrates faith, culture, and moral practice. In the context of South Nias, where communal values such as mutual cooperation are deeply embedded, the teacher successfully contextualized biblical compassion within local culture. This synergy between theology and tradition empowered students to see compassion not only as a Christian virtue but as a social responsibility. The result was a visible shift in classroom behavior: competitiveness gave way to collaboration, conflict turned into cooperation, and empathy became a shared moral language. Compassion, when modeled consistently, produced a ripple effect that extended beyond the classroom into families and the surrounding community. This study also affirms that the essence of teaching in Christian education is participation in God's ongoing redemptive work. Just as Joseph's "I will provide for you" reflected divine care in human form, so too the teacher's compassionate acts mirrored God's sustaining presence among students. This theological insight reinforces the idea that teaching with compassion is an act of ministry—a witness that transforms education into a space of healing and hope. Professional competence, therefore, must be understood as both technical proficiency and spiritual sensitivity: the ability to interpret biblical truth through daily relationships. The CRE teacher at SD Negeri 071103 Onohondro exemplified that social competence inspired by faith is the heartbeat of Christian education. Compassion, when lived out through relational integrity and emotional intelligence, becomes the pedagogy of redemption. In every act of listening, forgiving, and serving, the teacher participated in God's ongoing mission to reconcile and renew creation. Thus, to teach compassion in faith is to extend the "I will provide for you" of Genesis 45:11 into the lives of students—a faithful continuation of divine love that nourishes hearts, strengthens communities, and glorifies God through education.

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